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SOVIET WRITERS BEGIN TO CLARIFY "DEFENSIVE DEFENSE"

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## SOVIET WRITERS BEGIN TO CLARIFY "DEFENSIVE DEFENSE"<sup>1</sup>

The Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact issued a "revolutionary" communique in May of 1987 stating that its military doctrine would be "strictly defensive" in nature and require only the minimal level of weapons "sufficient" for the defense, thereby abrogating past reliance on rapid and powerful offensive maneuvers and an armor-heavy force posture. Many western analysts have been searching for insight into the implications of this pronouncement for Warsaw Pact force posture, defense spending, operational art and tactics, and many other facets of military affairs. This search has been frustrated not only by varying interpretations of the concept in the Soviet press, but also by the open admission of Soviet scholars who declare, "even we don't know what it means."

With the recent publication of an article by Dr. Kokoshin and Gen. Larionov, however, we may have drawn somewhat closer to a better understanding of what the Soviets now call a "non-offensive defense."<sup>2</sup>

Last year Kokoshin and Larionov coauthored an article analyzing the successful WWII counteroffensive during the Battle of Kursk.<sup>3</sup> The article described the defense as a "more economical method" of defeating the enemy by increasing fire density and anti-tank weapons, and laying mines and other obstacles. Kursk, the authors note, convincingly displayed the effectiveness of blunting an enemy offensive with *sufficient* forces--that is, forces capable only of conducting defensive operations.

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<sup>1</sup>This brief article appeared in *International Defense Review*, vol. 21, October 1988, p. 1244.

<sup>2</sup>A. Kokoshin, V. Larionov, "Opposing General Purpose Forces in the Context of Providing Strategic Stability," *MEiMO*, no. 6, 1988, pp. 23-31.

<sup>3</sup>A. Kokoshin, V. Larionov, "The Battle of Kursk in the Context of Contemporary Defensive Doctrine," *MEiMO*, no. 8, 1987, pp. 32-40.

The new article is more revealing, however, in that it describes four force posture versions beginning with the traditional offensive wherein deep thrusts are conducted onto enemy territory and ending with a defensive posture wherein neither side has the capability to conduct offensive operations. This version, in the author's view, offers the greatest strategic stability (see diagram). Although the authors insist that the four versions are hypothetical and should be used as an analytical tool for solving NATO-Warsaw Pact problems, it is not unreasonable to suspect that they represent a spectrum of views among military and civilian as to just how "defensive" the future battlefield should be.

The authors define the defensiveness of the versions in terms of NATO and the Warsaw Pact's capability to launch offensive thrusts into the enemy's territory based on their respective arsenals of weapons and troops as well as "qualitative factors" such as training, strategy and tactics, and others. Ideally, if "offensive" weapons are pared back substantially there will be no incentive to preempt--only to hold and defend one's territory. But as the authors correctly point out, it is very difficult to agree on which weapons systems are defensive.

As the following review of the "variants" will attempt to show, this elaboration of the non-offensive defense, while welcome and revealing, raises many more questions about the feasibility of a purely defensive posture.

The first version, as mentioned above, is simply the traditional offensive Soviet strategy based on the "deep battle theory" developed in the 1920s. This strategy emphasizes fire and maneuver at the front in concert with deep thrusts in the enemy's rear, and a large reserve of forces available for constant reinforcement. Second echelons and reserves, the authors note, will be exposed to unprecedented risk by NATO's strike aircraft and "reconnaissance-strike complexes" such as JSTARS, making this posture less attractive. Moreover, this version is viewed as least controllable from a command perspective and most likely to escalate to the employment of tactical nuclear weapons.

As described in the article, the second version whose model is the Kursk counteroffensive, varies little from the first. It envisions the creation of deeply echeloned and logistically well-developed positional defenses for both sides--enabling them to assume the counteroffensive readily with the help of reserves. Having assumed the offensive, the aggressor will attempt to capture all of the enemy territory. This version is similar to the first as it does not rule out preemption nor does it imply any cost for preemptive actions. Rather, it appears to call for a more balanced force posture wherein troops are prepared to undertake either form of combat actions with a vengeance. The authors themselves note that the potential for escalation to nuclear use is just as high in the second as in the first version. What is confusing is their recommendation that "each side orient its strategy and operational art such that the offensive is ruled out and only defensive actions can be conducted *during the initial stage* of the conflict." But who fires the initial shot? Is preemption considered a defensive concept?

The third version envisions counteroffensives occurring only on friendly territory and not extending beyond ones' borders. Each side exhibits a certain amount of restraint thereby maintaining the battle at an agreed-upon level of intensity. As historical examples, the authors describe the Soviet-Japanese conflict in Khalkin-Gol (1939) and the U.S. involvement in South Korea (1951). It is possible, of course, to envision a protracted, "hold own territory" war, although it is unclear how NATO and the Warsaw Pact would become embroiled in such a conflict initially.

Version four, considered most stable, envisions the dismantling of offensive weapons (strike aircraft, airborne and tank units, reconnaissance-strike complexes) at strategic and operational levels, thereby precluding the possibility of victory at operational and strategic levels, while permitting "counterattacks" at the tactical level. While they deem this posture the ultimate "non-offensive" defense, it is somewhat difficult to imagine tactical victories being contained during a high-speed future conflict, given the Soviets' long-held doctrinal tenet that a series of tactical victories will result in



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operational success. However, if the troops and weapons were truly reduced such that deep offensive actions were impossible to perform, strategic stability could certainly be enhanced.

Perhaps the most puzzling question that the authors leave unanswered is the role of preemption in a conventional conflict. While the authors have presented a useful framework for analyzing defensive postures and measures for containing a conflict in progress, they have not addressed *how the conflict may unfold*.

Although Soviet Chief of the General Staff, Marshal Akhromeyev has publicly stated that preemption is excluded from Warsaw Pact military doctrine, much of the Soviet literature continues to address the importance of battlefield preemption.<sup>4</sup> Discussions of preventing NATO's reconnaissance capabilities from beating the Soviets to the draw and detailed descriptions of offensive maneuvers and encirclement operations are replete in the Soviet military writings.

Although the authors leave much unanswered, their framework consisting of four hypothetical versions of an increasingly defensive defense does three things. First, it suggests that there may exist various interpretations of how defensive the force posture should become; second, it illustrates how far reaching are the changes that must take place in order for the military to transform itself from an offensive to a defensive orientation; and third, the framework *itself* makes a solid contribution to the discussion of Soviet military doctrine that has emerged in the wake of the Berlin communique.

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<sup>4</sup> Marshal Akhromeyev, *World Marxist Review*, no. 12, 1987, pp. 26-27.

FOUR FORCE POSTURES--FROM OFFENSIVE TO NON-OFFENSIVE DEFENSE

Variant	Character	Maneuvers	Escalation to Nuclear Use	Stability	Victory	Territory
I	Offensive	Meeting engagements	Rapid	Unstable	Strategic	Enemy's
II	Active defense	Counteroffensive, preemptive offensive actions	Rapid	More stable	Operational, strategic	Enemy's
III	Active defense	Counteroffensives limited to friendly territory	(-)	More stable	Tactical, operational	Own
IV	Non- offensive defense	Only tactical mobility, counter- attacks	(-)	Stable	Tactical	Own